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FRANCE

France's fourth ballistic missile submarine, the *Indomptable*, is ready to begin sea trials. According to the US defense attache in Paris, the initial tests of the nuclear-powered submarine will be conducted in the coastal waters off Cherbourg.

At the current rate of progress, the *Indomptable* should be ready to join the fleet in early 1977. It probably will be France's first submarine to carry a full load of sixteen M-20 missiles, which have a range of about 1,600 nautical miles and are armed with one-megaton thermonuclear warheads.

France currently plans to build six or seven ballistic missile submarines. Three already are operational, and the rest should be in service by the mid-1980s unless the budgetary squeeze forces Paris to slow development.

The defense attache also reported that the prototype reactor for France's first nuclear-powered attack submarine went critical in late November. The reactor now will be studied by naval propulsion specialists for its suitability in the planned class of 2,500-ton nuclear attack submarines.

Construction of the first submarine of this class has been delayed as a result of budget cuts already made. Consequently, the first of these boats now will not be operational until well into the 1980s.

Long-range plans still call for two squadrons of nuclear attack submarines in the 1980s. These probably will replace, rather than augment, some of the older, conventionally powered boats.